

United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)

Country name	United Arab Emirates ¹
State title	United Arab Emirates
Name of citizen	Citizen of the United Arab Emirates (or informally Emirati)
Official language(s)	Arabic (ara) ²
Country name in Arabic (Romanized in brackets)	الإمارات العربية المتحدة (Al Imārāt al ‘Arabīyah al Muttaḥidah) ³
State title in official language	الإمارات العربية المتحدة (Al Imārāt al ‘Arabīyah al Muttaḥidah)
Script	Arabic
Romanization System	BGN/PCGN 1956 System for Arabic
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	AR/ARE ⁴
Capital	Abu Dhabi
Capital in in Arabic (Romanized in brackets)	أبو ظبي (Abū Ḥaby)
Area	83,600km ²
Population	Approx. 9.5 million ⁵ (only 12% of which are native Emirati)

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) is a country in the Middle East, located on the Arabian Peninsula. It is a federation of seven emirates. In 1971, following independence from the United Kingdom, six emirates (Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah, Sharjah, Dubai, and Umm Al Quwain) merged to form the United Arab Emirates. They were joined in 1972 by Ras Al Khaimah⁶.

¹ The English name is a translation of the Arabic name. There is no official short form of the country name but in English the name is often abbreviated to the Emirates or U.A.E.

² ISO 639 language codes are provided for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

³ There is no official Arabic short form of the country name, but it is often abbreviated in Arabic to الإمارات (Al Imārāt), meaning the Emirates. The long-form name الإمارات العربية المتحدة (Dawlat al Imārāt al ‘Arabīyah al Muttaḥidah), meaning the State of the United Arab Emirates is sometimes applied to the country.

⁴ Although the abbreviation U.A.E. is widely used to refer to the country, the ISO 3-letter country code is ARE.

⁵ UN data:

https://data.un.org/ Docs/SYB/PDFs/SYB65_1_202209_Population,%20Surface%20Area%20and%20Density.pdf

⁶ See below for details of the individual emirates and their names.

The U.A.E. has a long coastline on the Persian Gulf⁷, a much shorter coastline on the Gulf of Oman and land boundaries with Oman and Saudi Arabia. Much of the country is low-lying desert, with arid mountains in the north-east. Abu Dhabi is the capital, although Dubai has a larger population. As with some other small oil-rich Gulf states, a large majority of the population are non-citizen expatriates.

The name of the country dates from independence from the UK in 1971. “Emirate” is an anglicised version of Arabic *imārah*, an area ruled by an *amīr* or emir (sometimes translated as “prince” in other contexts). Prior to independence, the area was known as the Trucial States, Trucial Coast or Trucial Oman (all regarded as shortened versions of “Trucial States of the Coast of Oman”); these names deriving from treaties which the individual emirates had signed with the UK at various times during the 19th century. At times, this term was understood to include Qatar and even Bahrain, but these states did not join the U.A.E.

Geographical names policy

Geographical names in the U.A.E. are found written in Arabic, which is the country’s official language. Where possible, Arabic-script names should be taken from official Emirati sources and romanized using the [BGN/PCGN 1956 Arabic Romanization System](#).

Tourist and military mapping were formerly produced by Military Survey of U.A.E. More recently this was spun off as a commercial organisation (Bayanat for Mapping & Surveying). Some links to geodata can be found on their website: <https://bayanat.ae/en/>. More recent mapping tends to have been produced for the municipal governments by commercial organisations. For example, Dubai has been collaborating with the UK’s Ordnance Survey⁸. The U.A.E. is now more focused on digital geospatial data, found on websites such as <https://geostat.fcsa.gov.ae/gisportal/home/>.

It should be noted that Roman-script forms may be encountered which differ from those arising from the application of the BGN/PCGN System for Arabic⁹. Some features have conventional English-language names which can be used in English-language text and should be shown in brackets after the romanized Arabic name on cartographic products. Examples include the names of several of the emirates, e.g. Abū Zāby (Abu Dhabi), Ash Shāriqah (Sharjah) and Dubayy (Dubai), as well as man-made features such as the artificial islands: Nakhlāt Jabal ‘Alī (Palm Jebel Ali), Nakhlāt Jumayrah (Palm Jumeirah) and Juzur al ‘Ālam (The World Islands).

Language

The official language of the U.A.E. is Arabic, which is a Semitic language written from right-to-left in Arabic script. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used for official written purposes. The Emirati dialect of Arabic is a variant of Gulf Arabic¹⁰ (afb) (also spoken in eastern Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states such as Qatar and Kuwait), but with pronunciation and/or vocabulary influences from *inter alia* Persian, English, and some Indian languages. There are few specifically “Emirati” dialect features. English is widely used in both government and education and is commonly spoken as a second language.

Gulf Arabic dialects are not so far removed from MSA as, for example, the Maghrebi Arabic dialects of North Africa. Below are listed some significant features of the dialect that may influence the pronunciation of Emirati toponyms, and consequently the non-standard Roman-script spellings of these toponyms that might be encountered. These features are also found in some other Gulf Arabic dialects:

⁷ See below for use of the name Persian Gulf.

⁸ <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/news/making-the-city-of-dubai-work-for-the-citizen-with-location-data>

⁹ See ‘Language’ section for details of potential variations.

¹⁰ Known in Arabic as *Khalījī*.

- The Arabic letter ق (qāf), which is romanized in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic as 'q' (in MSA it is pronounced as a voiceless uvular plosive (IPA: /q/)), is pronounced in some Gulf contexts as the 'g' in 'get' and may sometimes be seen spelt with 'g' rather than 'q' in Roman script. For example, the district of Sharjah, known as Abu Shagara (BGN/PCGN Romanization: Abū Shaqārah. The qāf may also be seen represented as 'j' in Roman-script forms, e.g. Sharjah (BGN/PCGN romanization: Ash Shāriqah).
- The Arabic letter ج (jīm), which is romanized in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic as 'j', and pronounced in MSA as the 'j' in 'jug' (IPA: /d͡ʒ/) is sometimes in Kuwait pronounced as the 'y' in 'may'. For example, the male personal name Mājid might be pronounced 'Mayid'. This pronunciation trait is less often transferred to Roman-script spellings than is the abovementioned q-to-g change.
- The Arabic letters ظ (ẓā') and ض (ḍād), romanized in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic as ẓ and ḍ respectively may both be seen represented in non-standard Roman script as 'd', 'dh' or 'z'. An example of this phenomenon in the U.A.E. is the conventional name Abu Dhabi (BGN/PCGN romanization: Abū Ḥabī).
- The definite article ال is romanized in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic as 'Al' or assimilated if followed by one of the 'sun' letters, e.g. Al Qamar, Ash Shams. In Gulf Arabic pronunciation, the initial alif, 'a' sound is commonly dropped. Nevertheless, the 'a' is usually retained in Emirati Arabic- and Roman-script spellings. An example of this phenomenon is the local pronunciation of the Arabic country name of Kuwait, which is /li-kweet/, however it is still usually seen romanized as Al Kuwayt or Al Kuwait.¹¹

¹¹ For further details on the romanization of the definite article see the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings¹²):

The **BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script¹³:

Upper case	Unicode encoding	Lower case	Unicode encoding
Á	00C1	á	00E1
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ḍ	1E10	ḍ	1E11
Ḥ	1E28	ḥ	1E29
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Ṭ	0162	ṭ	0163
Ū	016A	ū	016B
Ẓ	005A+0327*	ẓ	007A+0327*
‘	2018 or 02BB	’	2019 or 02BC

*Note, the z + cedilla is not available as a single encoding.

Boundaries and toponymic disputes

The U.A.E. has international land boundaries with Oman and Saudi Arabia. Oman includes the Musandam peninsula, which is separated from the rest of the country by U.A.E. territory. The Omani exclave of Madhā’ is completely surrounded by U.A.E. territory. Within Madhā’ is An Naḥwah, a village that belongs to the U.A.E. (administratively part of Sharjah Emirate).

Gulf Islands

The territory of the U.A.E. includes several islands. Iran administers three islands in the Persian Gulf which are claimed by the United Arab Emirates. PCGN recommends using the Conventional names for these islands on UK products and mapping. The Arabic and Persian names are provided in the table below for reference.

Conventional Name	Arabic Language Name	Persian Language Name	Location
Abu Musa	Jazīrat Abū Mūsá	Jazīreh-ye Abū Mūsá	25° 52' 30" N 055° 01' 48" E
Greater Tunb	Jazīrat Ṭunb al Kubrá	Jazīreh-ye Tonb-e Bozorg	26° 15' 50" N 055° 18' 18" E
Lesser Tunb	Jazīrat Ṭunb aṣ Ṣuḡhrá	Jazīreh-ye Tonb-e Kūchak	26° 14' 31" N 055° 08' 50" E

¹² See www.unicode.org

¹³ Characters can be manually input into Microsoft Word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the ‘Insert – Symbol’ command can be used; the code can be entered into the ‘Character code’ box which will show the corresponding letter. A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/gns_services.html.

Persian Gulf

PCGN recommends using the name Persian Gulf on UK products, as this has long been considered the English-language conventional name for this body of water, which is a high seas feature, extending beyond the territorial limits of any recognized sovereignty. The Arabian Gulf is an English-language version of the name applied by Arabs to this body of water and should not be used.¹⁴ In UK English this feature is often referred to as The Gulf and this more neutral name can be used when it is clear that it refers to this body of water.¹⁵

Administrative structure

The seven emirates, which make up the U.A.E. constitute the first-order administrative divisions (ADM1) of the country. The seven emirates are listed below. In all cases the built-up area/populated place of the same name as the emirate functions as the administrative centre of the emirate. Each emirate has a conventional/anglicised spelling of its name that is widely used in Roman-script contexts, both in U.A.E. and abroad. PCGN recommends that the conventional English-language names which can be used in English-language text and should be shown in brackets after the romanized Arabic name on cartographic products.

The Seven Emirates (ADM1s) of United Arab Emirates

BGN/PCGN romanized Arabic name	Conventional name	Name in Arabic script	Variant names	ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	Location
Abū Ḥaby	Abu Dhabi	أبو ظبي		AE-AZ	23° 40' 00" N, 054° 00' 00" E
‘Ajmān	Ajman	عجمان		AE-AJ	25° 23' 00" N, 055° 31' 00" E
Dubayy	Dubai	دبي		AE-DU	25° 00' 00" N, 055° 20' 00" E
Al Fujayrah	Fujairah	الفجيرة	Fujaira, Fujayrah, Fujeira	AE-FU	25° 08' 00" N, 056° 15' 00" E
Ra’s al Khaymah	Ras Al Khaimah	رأس الخيمة	Ras al Khaima	AE-RK	25° 40' 00" N, 056° 00' 00" E
Ash Shāriqah	Sharjah	الشارقة	Shargah, Shārijah, Shaja	AE-SH	25° 00' 00" N, 055° 45' 00" E
Umm al Qaywayn	Umm Al Quwain	أم القيوين	Umm al Qaiwain, Um al Qawain, Umm al Qiwain	AE-UQ	25° 30' 00" N, 055° 45' 00" E

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Recommended Name	Name in Native Script	Conventional Name	Variant Names/Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Nakhlāt Jabal ‘Alī	نخلة جبل علي	Palm Jebel Ali	Nakhla Jabal Ali	25°00'N 54°59'E	Artificial island
Nakhlāt Jumayrah	نخلة جميرة	Palm Jumeirah	Naklah Jumayra, Palm Jumeira	25°07'00"N 55°08'00"E	Artificial island

¹⁴ The Arabic language name for this body of water is Al Khalīj al ‘Arabī (الخليج العربي) and the Persian language name is Khalīj-e Fārs (خليج فارس).

¹⁵ In North America the term “The Gulf” may also be used to refer to the Gulf of Mexico.

TOPONYMIC FACT FILE

PCGN Recommended Name	Name in Native Script	Conventional Name	Variant Names/Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Juzur al 'Ālam	جزر العالم	The World Islands	-	25°13'00"N 55°10'00"E	Artificial island
Gulf of Oman	خليج عمان (Khalīj 'Umān)	Gulf of Oman	Sea of Oman, Baḥr 'Umān	25°N 58°E	Gulf
Strait of Hormuz	مضيق هرمز (Maḍīq Hurmuz)	Strait of Hormuz	Bāb-e Hormuz, Bab-e Hormoz, Maḍīq Hurmūz, Tangeh-ye Hormoz	26°37'00"N 56°30'00"E	Strait
Abū al Abyaḍ	أبو الأبيض	-	Abul Abyad, Abul Abyadh	24°12'29"N 53°48'36"E	Island (Jazīrat)
Sīr Banī Yās	سير بني ياس	-	Al Yas, Jezirat Yas, Sir Banias, Sir Beni Yas, Yas, Yas Island	24°19'33"N 52°36'05"E	Island (Jazīrat)
Dās	داس	-	-	25°09'00"N 52°53'00"E	Island (Jazīrat)
Zirkūh	زركوه	-	Az Zarqā', Zarkā, Zīrkū, Zirko	24°53'03"N 53°04'20"E	Island (Jazīrat)
Dalmā	دلما	-	Dalmah	24°30'40"N 52°18'32"E	Island (Jazīrat)
Al Qaffāy	القفاي	-	Al Qaffay, Al Qafāy, Gaffai, Kafāi, Kafāy, Qaffai	24°35'07"N 51°43'22"E	Island (Jazīrat)
As Sila'	السلع	-	Al Sil', As Sil', Sila	24°01'29"N 51°45'54"E	Populated place
Ar Ruways	الرويس	-	Ruwais; Ar Ru'ays; Ar Ruwways, Ruweis	24°06'37"N 52°43'50"E	Populated place
Al 'Ayn	العين	-	Al Ain, El Ain, 'Ain	24°11'57"N 55°46'19"E	Populated place
Kalbā	كلبا	-	Kalbah	25°04'29"N 56°21'20"E	Populated place
Khawr Fakkān	خور فكان	-	Khor Fakkan, Khor al Fakkan, Khorfakan, Khor Fakhan, Khor al Fakhan	25°19'53"N 56°20'31"E	Populated place/Port & Bay
Yās	جزيرة ياس (Jazīrat Yās)	Yas Island		24°30'N 54°36'E	Leisure Island

Useful references

- Abu Dhabi Spatial Data Infrastructure: <https://sdi.gov.abudhabi/sdi/>
 - BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14703998>
 - BGN/PCGN Arabic Romanization System:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1119536/ROMANIZATION_OF_ARABIC_-_Nov_22.pdf
 - CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-arab-emirates/>
 - Languages: www.ethnologue.com, www.omniglot.com
 - International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
 - ISO Online Browsing Platform: <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#search>
 - PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
 - Unicode: www.unicode.org
 - United Nations Data: <https://data.un.org/>
 - US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server:
<https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/index.html>
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September 2023